

Ad Hoc Select Committees: Use in the House of Representatives

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A select committee is generally created to focus on a specific, significant issue. Although not extensively used in recent years, select committees have been employed when jurisdiction over a subject matter is so fragmented or overlapping that no single committee has a clearly established leading jurisdictional authority. As such, the development of a coordinated approach may only be possible through the use of a select committee. An ad hoc select committee is a type of select panel that is usually formed for a single purpose to deal with a specific subject. This report describes the creation and membership of the four instances the House has formed ad hoc select committees. It will be updated as events warrant.

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Judy Schneider

Specialist on the Congress

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A select committee is a panel established by resolution for a special purpose, and usually for a limited time. Most select committees are created because jurisdiction over a subject matter is so fragmented or overlapping that no committee has exclusive responsibility over the subject. An ad hoc select committee is a type of select committee that can be formed for a single purpose to deal with a specific subject within a limited time frame. An ad hoc select committee may be granted the authority to report legislation, but the extent of that authority has been carefully defined in past uses.

The Committee Reform Amendments of 1974 authorized the Speaker to create ad hoc committees to consider measures or matters that fall within the jurisdiction of several standing committees. The Committee Reform Amendments also required that such ad hoc committees include members of the appropriate standing committees. Four ad hoc select committees have been created since 1974: the Ad Hoc Select Committee on the Outer Continental Shelf, the Ad Hoc Select Committee on Energy, the Select Committee on Homeland Security, and the Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina.

Ad Hoc Select Committee on the Outer Continental Shelf

Creation

The Ad Hoc Select Committee on the Outer Continental Shelf was created in the 94th Congress, on April 22, 1975, pursuant to H.Res. 412, and reauthorized in the 95th Congress pursuant to H.Res. 97, adopted on January 11, 1977. The committee officially expired on June 30, 1980. The panel was authorized to report to the House on specific legislation (revision of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act), thereby granting it legislative jurisdiction.

Membership

The panel was slated to have 16 members, although that was increased by the Speaker on May 6, 1975, to 19 members. The ratio reflected party strength in the chamber; the majority was granted 11 seats (increased to 19) and the minority was granted 5 seats (increased to 6). The resolution creating the panel also stipulated that the Speaker was to appoint members from the Committees on Interior and Insular Affairs (now Resources), Judiciary, and Merchant Marine and Fisheries (now predominantly in Resources). The reauthorization resolution in the 95th Congress specified that the Speaker should appoint other members from other committees “so as to insure the expeditious consideration and reporting of appropriate legislation.”

Ad Hoc Committee on Energy

Creation

The Ad Hoc Committee on Energy was created in the 95th Congress on April 21, 1977, pursuant to H.Res. 508. The panel was authorized to “consider and report to the House on the Message of the President dated April 20, 1977, (relating to comprehensive energy legislation and creation of a Department of Energy) on other messages or communications related thereto, and on any bill or resolution which the Speaker may sequentially refer thereto which the Speaker determines relates to the substance of the President’s Message: *Provided however*, that this paragraph shall not preclude initial reference to the ad hoc Committee of a bill or resolution incorporating the recommendations of the committees with the subject-matter jurisdiction over the substance of the President’s Message.” The Speaker imposed a time deadline for the standing committees to complete action.

Membership

The panel was slated to have 37 members, although that was increased to 40, pursuant to H.Res. 509. Reflecting party strength in the chamber, the majority party was granted 25 seats (increased to 27), and the minority was granted 12 seats (increased to 13). The Speaker was directed to appoint members “from those committees of the House which he determines have subject-matter jurisdiction over the substance of the President’s Message, and from such other committees as the Speaker may determine so as to insure the expeditious consideration and reporting of appropriate legislation.” Of the 40 members, 11 were from the Committee on Commerce (now Energy and Commerce), 10 from the Committee on Ways and Means, 5 from the Committee on Banking (now Financial Services), and the rest were appointed from the Committees on Government Operations (now Government Reform), Public Works (now Transportation and Infrastructure), Interior and Insular Affairs (now Resources), and Science and Technology (now Science).

Select Committee on Homeland Security

Creation

The Select Committee on Homeland Security was created in the 107th Congress, pursuant to H.Res. 449, adopted on June 19, 2002. The panel was authored to “develop recommendations and report to the House on such matters that relate to the establishment of a department on homeland security...” The resolution also provided that each standing or permanent select committee which received a referral of the bill to create a department of homeland security would submit the recommendation to the select committee. The Speaker imposed a July 12, 2002 time deadline for the standing and permanent select committees to complete action. During floor debate, the majority leader stated that the Speaker and Democratic leader would jointly propose to the Committee on Rules a resolution governing floor consideration of the select committee’s recommendations.

Membership

The panel had nine members, five majority members and four minority members. The members appointed represent the respective party’s elected leadership, minus the Speaker and Minority Leader.

Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina

Creation

The Select Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and response to Hurricane Katrina was created in the 109th Congress, pursuant to H.Res. 437, adopted on September 15, 2005. The panel was authorized to investigate and report to the House on 1) “the development, coordination, and execution by local, state, and federal authorities of emergency response plans and other activities in preparation for Hurricane Katrina; and 2) the local, state, and federal government response to Hurricane Katrina.” The Select Committee was to report membership by February 15, 2006.

Membership

The panel was to have 20 members, 11 majority members and 9 minority members. The minority did not appoint members.

Author Information

Judy Schneider
Specialist on the Congress

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